

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 INR-05

INRE-00 SP-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 L-01 /037 W

----- 103099

O 112127Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 9730

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 1444

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E.O. 11652: XGDS 3

TAGS: PINT, HO

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH MINLAB FONSECA

1. POLOFF HAD CONVERSATION WITH MINLAB FONSECA ON EVENING OF APRIL 10. FONSECA SAID THAT IT WAS MOST UNFORTUNATE THAT THE MILITARY CHANGES TOOK PLACE AT THE SAME TIME AS THE SURFACING OF THE BRIBERY CHARGES. HE CONFIRMED THE FACT THAT LOPEZ' POWER HAD BEEN GREATLY REDUCED BY THE MILITARY CHANGES OF LAST WEEK, AND THAT THE LT. COLONEL'S GROUP IS THE REAL POWER IN THE COUNTRY. WITHOUT SAYING SO DIRECTLY, HE APPEARED TO BELIEVE THAT LOPEZ IS ON HIS WAY OUT. HE ALSO APPEARED TO BE UNCERTAIN ABOUT WHETHER LOPEZ AND OTHER MINISTERS WERE INVOLVED IN THE BRIBE. HE OBSERVED THAT HE HAD ONCE BEEN A MEMBER OF THE BANANA COMMISSION BUT HAD BEEN "EXCLUDED" FROM ITS CONSIDERATIONS. HE REMARKED THAT HE DIDN'T KNOW WHY AT THE TIME, BUT THAT HE HAD A GUESS NOW.

2. FONSECA STATED THAT HE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE CONTRY. HE SAID THE LT. COLONELS WERE YOUNG AND INEXPERIENCED IN THE TASKS OF GOVERNMENT. HE SAID THAT THEY MAY BE BETTER TECHNICALLY IN THEIR OWN PROFESSION THAN OLDER OFFICERS BUT THAT SUCH CAPABILITIES DID NOT PREPARE THEM FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES. HE SAID THAT THE LT. COLONELS' GROUP IS GUIDED BY NO IDEOLOGY
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AND THAT THERE ARE NO IDENTIFIABLE LEADERS. HE FEARS THAT

THEY HAVE NO PLAN FOR GOVERNING THE COUNTRY OR DEALING WITH ITS MANY COMPLEX PROBLEMS, AND THAT THEY COULD EASILY MAKE IMPORTANT DECISIONS AFFECTING THE COUNTRY'S FUTURE WITHOUT ADEQUATE EVALUATION OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF SUCH ACTIONS.

3. FONSECA SAID THAT COLONEL MELGAR WILL REPLACE LOPEZ IF HE RESIGNS OR IS REMOVED AND EMPHASIZED THAT THE "VERDICT" OF THE INVESTIGATING COMMITTEE WILL HAVE A GREAT DEAL TO DO WITH WHAT HAPPENS TO LOPEZ. HE REITERATED THAT THE SCANDAL IS A SHAME FOR HONDURAS AND STAINS THE HONOR OF THE ARMED FORCES AND ALL WHO HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THE GOVERNMENT.

4. HE REMARKED THAT THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS CONSIDERED ONLY TWO ALTERNATIVES IN ITS MEETING ON APRIL 9. ONE WOULD HAVE HAD LOPEZ HAND OVER HIS POWER ON A TEMPORARY BASIS TO AWAIT THE FINDINGS OF AN INVESTIGATION AND THE OTHER WAS TO HAVE HIM REMAIN IN CONTROL UNTIL THE INVESTIGATION IS COMPLETE. FONSECA SAID THAT HE PROPOSED THE SECOND ALTERNATIVE AS BEING MORE LIKELY TO PRESERVE PUBLIC CALM.

5. FONSECA OBSERVED THAT THE UB BRIBE AND SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS WILL UNDOUBTEDLY CAUSE MANY DIFFICULTIES IN BILATERAL HONDURAS-US RELATIONS. IN ADDITION, HE LAMENTED THE FACT THAT THE SCANDAL WOULD ALSO INTERFERE WITH THE COUNTRY'S INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT AND FOREIGN CREDIT.

6. COMMENT: FONSECA APPEARED TO BE VERY CONCERNED ABOUT THE SITUATION AND SEEMED TO BE ON THE VERGE OF TEARS. AS AN HONORABLE MAN, HE SEES THE PRESENT SITUATION AS HUMILIATING AND DISGRACEFUL BOTH FOR HIS COUNTRY AND FOR HIMSELF. IN A YEAR AND A HALF'S CONTACT WITH FONSECA, EVEN IN THE AFTERMATH OF HURRICANE FIFI, NEVER HAS HE APPEARED SO DEPRESSED ABOUT THE STATE OF THINGS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: BRIBERY, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, POLITICAL SITUATION, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS, ALLEGATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 11 APR 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975TEGUCI01444
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X3
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750127-0662
From: TEGUCIGALPA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750456/aaaacabo.tel
Line Count: 96
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <09 SEP 2003 by KelleyW0>; APPROVED <10 SEP 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONVERSATION WITH MINLAB FONSECA
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, HO, UNITED BRANDS, (FONSECA ZUNIGA, GUATAMA), (LOPEZ ARELLANO, OSWALDO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006